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ANTIGENS WITH VACCINE POTENTIAL

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: BETTY K.L. SIM

PI ADDRESS: Department of Immunology
Walter Reed Army Institute of Research
Washington, DC 20307-5100

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FOREWORD

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N/A For the protection of human subjects, the investigator(s) have adhered to policies of applicable Federal Law 45CFR46.

In conducting research utilizing recombinant DNA technology, the investigator(s) adhered to current guidelines promulgated by the National Institutes of Health.

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INTRODUCTION

Malaria disease which is estimated to directly account for more than 2 million deaths per year worldwide, is caused by the erythrocytic stages of parasites of the genus Plasmodium. It is thought by many to be the most important infectious disease in the world. Aiding the spread of the disease is the increasing incidence of drug resistant strains of the parasite. For these reasons there have been major efforts to develop malaria vaccines. The development of effective vaccines is complicated by the fact that potentially protective antigens are specific for each of the main developmental stages of this parasite. An effective vaccine is envisaged to contain a mixture of different stage antigens. The major focus of this research has been directed against the erythrocytic stages of the parasite; the stage responsible for the pathology and morbidity of the disease.

After release from mature schizonts, merozoites must invade erythrocytes within minutes to ensure further development and maintenance of the life cycle. The process of merozoite recognition and invasion of erythrocytes involves a sialic acid-dependent ligand (1-3). A previous study described a 175 K protein antigen in culture supernatants that binds to a sialic acid-dependent ligand on erythrocytes and to an unknown ligand on merozoites (4), acting as a bridge between erythrocyte and merozoite. This molecule, EBA-175, has obvious value as a target antigen for vaccine development as antibodies against it may interfere effectively with the invasion of merozoites into erythrocytes.

The purpose of the present work is to isolate and characterise the gene encoding EBA-175, select portions of the protein encoded by this gene for immunogenicity studies, and to determine if the antibodies elicited by such antigens inhibit the invasion of merozoites into erythrocytes.

The methods of approach used were to screen a genomic expression library with an affinity purified antibody to EBA-175, select appropriate clones, sequence the clones to obtain the entire sequence of the gene encoding EBA-175, analyse the deduced amino acid sequence for potentially immunogenic domains, synthesise peptides from these domains, immunise mice and rabbits with these peptides, and determine if the antibodies induced by such immunizations recognized the peptides, blood stage parasites, EBA-175 on Western blots, and inhibited merozoite invasion of erythrocytes.

BODY

A) SUMMARY OF ANNUAL REPORT (FEBRUARY 1988 - FEBRUARY 1989)

It was reported in the annual report that a clone containing part of the gene encoding EBA-175 had been identified from the screening of an expression library. The following is a brief description of sections which have been described in detail in the annual report:

- i) Reagent to screen library: This was a monospecific affinity purified antibody to EBA-175.
- ii) Genomic library: A genomic expression library in gt11 was constructed and screened .
- iii) Screening the library: A clone designated EBA9, containing an insert size of 1.8 kb was identified.
- iv) Confirmatory studies: The clone with the 1.8 kb insert was introduced into an expression host and proteins expressed were analysed in Western blots to confirm that the 1.8 kb was actually part of the gene encoding EBA-175.
- v) Sequencing the clone EBA9: The entire clone was sequenced by the dideoxy chain termination method of Sanger.
- vi) Characterization of the 1.8 kb insert: This insert was used as a probe in genomic Southern analyses to show the strain conservation of the EBA-175 gene.
- vii) Synthetic peptides predictive of antigenic determinants: Synthetic peptides were made from regions of the molecule with high hydrophilicity indices and large beta turns.

- viii) Immunization with synthetic peptides: Peptides were conjugated to KLH acting as a carrier and used to immunise mice and rabbits.
- ix) Isolating other regions of the EBA-175 gene: Attempts were made to isolate a 5.5 kb XbaI restriction fragment which contains further upstream sequences of the EBA-175 gene.

B) RESEARCH REPORT (FEBRUARY 1989 - FEBRUARY 1990)

1) Isolation of the complete gene encoding EBA-175.

The size selected XbaI genomic library was screened with for the clone containing the 5.5 kb fragment, using labeled 1.8 kb as probe. The library was plated at a concentration of 1,000 colonies per large Petri plate. The library was screened as described by Sim (4). Briefly, duplicate nitrocellulose filter lifts of the colonies were made and lysed in situ by placing them sequentially in puddles of 0.5M NaOH, 1M Tris pH7.4 and 1.5M NaCl, 0.5M Tris pH 7.4 prior to immobilization to filters and hybridization . More than 3,000 clones of the library were screened in this attempt. Two positive clones were identified, and both contained inserts of the expected 5.5 kb. Restriction analyses with enzymes Eco RI, Ddel and HindIII showed that these two clones were identical. As such only one of the clones, designated the Xba 5.5 kb clone was selected for further study. The strategy used to sequence further unidentified upstream sequences in this 5.5 kb fragment was as follows. The enzyme Exonuclease III was used to digest the 5.5 kb fragment sequentially generating deletion fragments. Hybridization analyses identified the deletion fragments which were located further upstream from the 1.8 kb fragment. These upstream fragments were cloned into the bidirectional sequencing vector pGEM 4Z, and sequencing was by method of Sanger (5). There was an additional 2.1 kb of new upstream open reading frame sequences.

The approach taken to obtain further upstream sequences were as follows. Oligonucleotide primers were synthesized and used to amplify a 500 bp fragment at the 5' region of the Xba 5.5 kb clone by the polymerase chain reaction (6). The amplification reaction was performed for 30 cycles in a Perkin-Elmer Cetus thermal cycler (programmed for 1.5 mins. at 95°C, 2 mins. at 45°C, and 4 mins. at 72°C, followed by a final step of 5 mins. at 72°C. This amplified fragment was labeled and used as a probe to screen the previously mentioned gt11 library. Three positive plaques (9₂, 13₁ and 13₂)were identified and used as individual probes in genomic Southern. The clone 9₂ was found to contain no new upstream sequences. The clones 13₁ and 13₂ were found to be identical and sequence analysis showed that they both contained an additional 400 bp of new upstream sequences.

The same strategy was used to identify fragments containing the rest of the gene encoding EBA-175. Essentially, 20 bp oligonucleotide primers at the 5' region of the 13₁ clone were synthesized and used to amplify a 250 bp fragment using the polymerase chain reaction. This amplified fragment was used as a probe to identify a 3.5 kb XbaI fragment on a genomic Southern. To obtain this 3.5 kb fragment, a size selected (2.3 kb - 4.4 kb) XbaI library was constructed in pGEM4Z, and screened using the 250 bp amplified fragment as probe. A positive clone (Xba 14) containing an insert of the correct size and hybridization profile was obtained. Clone Xba 14 was sequenced and found to contain the rest of the gene.

The gene encoding EBA-175 was found to be 4.281 kb and contained no introns (Fig.1) Unlike most *P.falciparum* genes which have been studied, the gene encoding EBA-175 does not contain repeats. The deduced amino acid sequence of EBA-175 contains regions that are similar to the sialic acid binding residues of influenza virus hemagglutinin (boxed residues in Fig. 1).

2) Synthetic peptides predictive of antigenic determinants.

Two peptides KIM2 and KIM4 were synthesized and used to immunise mice and rabbits as reported in the annual report. Antibodies raised against peptide KIM2 did not recognise *P. falciparum* parasites in immunofluorescence analyses, did not recognise authentic EBA-175 in Western blots nor did they immunoprecipitate EBA-175.

Antibodies against peptide KIM4 recognized free merozoites as well as merozoites in segmenters [Fig.2. Phase contrast a,c; immunofluorescence b,d)] in immunofluorescence analyses (7). Furthermore, antibodies to peptide KIM4 recognized authentic EBA-175 in Western blots and immunoprecipitated EBA-175. Immunoprecipitation and fluorography were performed as described (8,9).

3) The biological function of antibodies to peptide KIM4

Antibodies against peptide KIM4 were found to inhibit the invasion of merozoites into erythrocytes *in vitro*. Inhibition of merozoite invasion assays were performed as previously described (10) and anti peptide KIM4 sera were preabsorbed on human erythrocytes and heat inactivated (56°C , 30 mins.) prior to use. Percent inhibition was calculated based on sera from rabbits immunized with KLH alone. The actual percentage of infected erythrocytes was significantly lower ($p<0.005$, student's t test) in the erythrocytes exposed to anti peptide KIM4 sera as compared to anti-KLH sera at serum dilutions of 1/5 (2.3 ± 0.33 vs 13.7 ± 0.33 , mean \pm SEM percentage of infected erythrocytes), 1/10 (4.3 ± 1.20 vs 13.7 ± 0.33), and 1/20 (8.3 ± 0.33 vs 14.0 ± 0.33). Inhibition of invasion was also seen in 3 separate experiments performed in triplicates.

4) Sequence conservation of the peptide KIM4 functional domain

A 492 bp fragment (amino acid residues 992-1155) inclusive of KIM4 was amplified in 7 strains of *P. falciparum* [Camp (Malaysia), FCR3 (Uganda), Thai TN (Thailand), ItG (Brazil), 7G8 (Brazil), Honduras, LE5 (Liberia)] using oligonucleotide primers by the polymerase chain reaction (6). Five μl of reaction mixture was fractionated on a 1% agarose gel to confirm the size of the amplified products, and the gel was Southern blotted and probed with the 1.8 kb fragment of EBA-175 which included the sequence corresponding to EBA-peptide KIM4, to further confirm the specificity of the amplified products. The amplified products were ligated into the bidirectional sequencing vector pGEM4Z (Promega). Clones containing inserts were sequenced (Sequenase, U.S. Biochemical). The sequencing primers used were SP6 and T7. At least 3 randomly picked clones from each parasite strain were sequenced to ascertain the sequence obtain.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this project was to identify potential malaria vaccine candidates. An erythrocyte binding antigen of malaria with a molecular weight of 175 kd (EBA-175) identified in culture supernatants, was previously shown to bind to a sialic acid-dependent ligand on erythrocytes and appeared to function as a parasite invasion receptor. It was postulated that antibodies against EBA-175 would interfere effectively with the parasite invasion process into red cells. An affinity purified monospecific antibody to EBA-175 was used to screen an expression library for the gene encoding EBA-175. This gene was cloned and sequenced. A 43 amino acid peptide (KIM4) predictive of an antigenic determinant was selected from the deduced 1426 amino acid sequence of EBA-175. Antibodies raised against peptide KIM4 inhibited the invasion of parasites into erythrocytes. The nucleotide sequence encoding the peptide KIM4 was shown to be strictly conserved among 7 strains of *P. falciparum* studied. These results confirm the importance of EBA-175 in parasite invasion and identify a region upon which vaccine development efforts should focus.

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Figure 1. Nucleotide and deduced amino acid sequences of EBA-175. Nucleotides are numbered on the right and amino acids are numbers on the left. EBA-peptide 4 (*r*-residues 920-962 on this figure) is underlined. Amino acid residues which are homologous to the sialic acid binding site residues of influenza virus hemagglutinin are boxed.

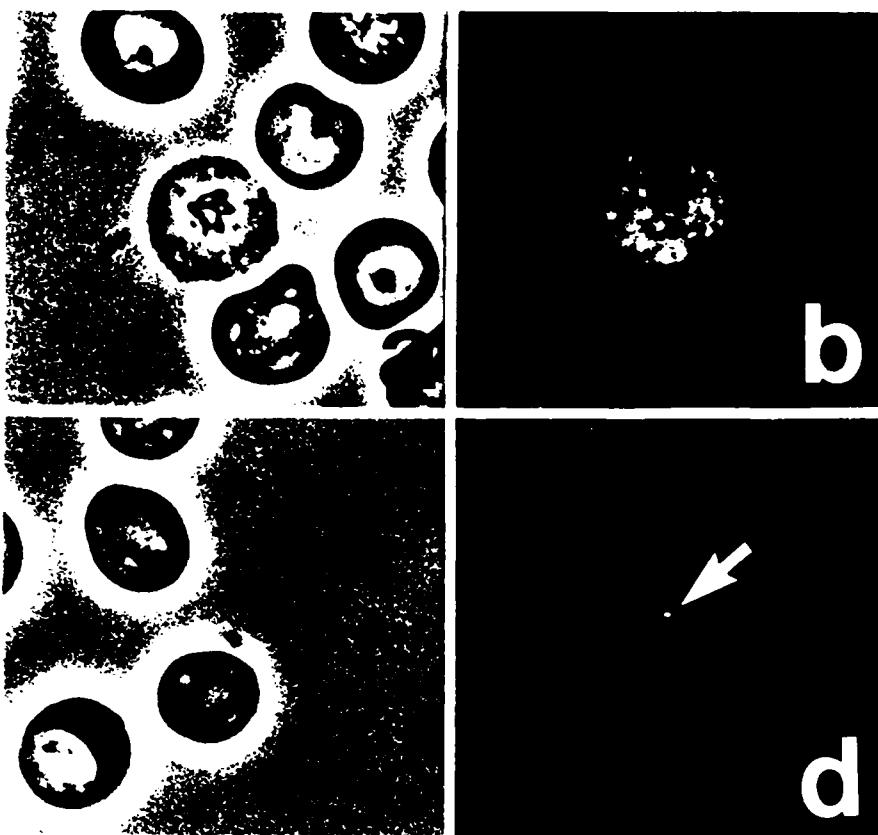


Figure 2. Immunofluorescence localization of EBA-175 by mouse antibodies against EBA-peptide 4 were performed with methanol-fixed thin blood films of Camp strain parasites as previously described. a. schizont-infected erythrocyte (phase contrast); b. schizont-infected erythrocyte showing localization of EBA-175; c. free merozoite (phase contrast); d. free merozoite showing localization of EBA-175. Magnification is 1000X. Identical immunofluorescence results were obtained with rabbit anti-peptide 4 antibody as well as with parasites of the FCR3, ItG and 7G8 strains.

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